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ENHANCING INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY-BASED PEACEBUILDING IN CROATIA

Policy Paper

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Peacebuilding as a Policy Agenda

Peacebuilding is a concept used both in policymaking and community-building arenas, referring to a wide array of efforts at all societal levels that aim to transform social relationships, structures and culture in a direction conducive to reduction of root causes of social conflicts, such as political and economic inequality, and enhance the capacity of individuals, groups and institutions to manage emerging conflicts nonviolently and constructively.

The UN *Agenda for Peace* introduces peacebuilding as a complementary measure to preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peacekeeping. While peacemaking and peacekeeping primarily include efforts to open possibilities of peace negotiations, disarmament and physical separation of warring parties, peacebuilding is defined as an "action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict" and as "the construction of a new environment", involving "sustained, cooperative work to deal with underlying economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems (that) can place an achieved peace on a durable foundation."¹

The 2001 European Commission *Communication on Conflict Prevention* stresses the importance of an integrated approach to conflict prevention, which revolves around the concept of *structural stability*. "Characteristics of structural stability are sustainable economic development, democracy and respect for human rights, viable political structures and healthy environmental and social conditions, with the capacity to manage change without resort to conflict. All these elements need to be addressed in an integrated way. Most importantly, co-operation programmes are increasingly based on the countries' own strategies since it is now well recognised that ownership is a condition for success, allowing for consideration of countries' own situation, history and culture."² The Communication explicitly mentions the beneficial role of NGOs in long-term conflict prevention: "By virtue of their support for the development of civil society and democracy, NGOs are key actors in long-term conflict prevention. They are often present on the ground in situations where official state structures are absent. They can also function as grass roots mediators as well as reliable and neutral observers in

¹ UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali. (1992). *An Agenda for Peace* (A/47/277 - S/24111) 17 June 1992, paragraph 57. <http://www.un.org/Docs/SG/agpeace.html>

² European Commission. (2001). *Communication from the Commission on Conflict Prevention*. COM(2001) 211 final, April 11, 2001. page 10.
http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/cfsp/news/com2001_211_en.pdf

situation where there is no international presence. Mediation activities of specialist NGOs have sometimes proved decisive in a crisis.”³

Peacebuilding in the Croatian Policy Arena

Despite the fact that the deep political divisions and socio-economic problems feature the country's overall political, economic and social profile even seven years upon the end of military operations, Croatia does not have a comprehensive strategy for peacebuilding, which would take into account the effects of the country's war-stricken history and provide a basis for a long-term transformation of social relationships, laws, institutions and culture to make the society more resilient to violent conflict and more capable of the protection and promotion of human rights, democratic governance and sustainable economic development.

According to the 2001 census, the density of population in the Croatian post-war areas of only 22.3 inhabitants per square kilometer is 3.5 times lower than the average density of Croatia and even 4.6 times lower than the density of the rest of the country. Over the past ten years the total number of inhabitants in these areas has decreased by 40%, in comparison to the average decrease of 3% in Croatia as a whole. In war-affected areas, the unemployment rate was around 43% at the end of 2001 and has not been significantly changed since then⁴. The employment rate of 40% was more than one third lower than the Croatian average of 55% in July 2001. Despite the fact that the employment rate is growing (by 7% in 2001), so is the unemployment rate (by 9% in 2001), hence there is no significant improvement in the overall structure of employment. The post-war areas, which make up 8.03% of the total population of Croatia, account for 21.7% of total social welfare benefits. When social welfare benefits are deducted from the total per capita income, inhabitants of post-war areas make only 51.8% of the personal per capita income made by average inhabitants of Croatia⁵.

Key government measures for these areas endorsed by the Parliament in July 2002 have mostly focused on the development of infrastructure and stimulation of entrepreneurship, while its taxation incentives have primarily targeted individuals rather than local governments, which have thus continued to rely primarily on central government incentives. It is apparent that none of the measures, with the exception of planned business incubators and business education in one pilot project, take into account the need for the accumulation of social capital, particularly through enhancement of business leadership, self-initiative, recreation of social networks, enhancement of security and confidence building, despite the fact that lack of entrepreneurial spirit and broken social ties have been pointed out in the report as key factors of underdevelopment.

Considering that the creation of a peacebuilding policy framework is an incremental process contingent on the endorsement of and familiarity with the peacebuilding agenda on part of key political actors, *there is an immediate need to take advantage of existent opportunities for enriching and entwining different, currently disconnected legislative, institutional and programmatic frameworks conducive to peacebuilding,*

³ Ibid. page 28.

⁴ No more recent data are available; segregated data for areas of special state concern are available from the Croatian Bureau of Employment, except for the data presented in the 2002 Government Report.

⁵ The review socio-economic indicators is based on the Government *Report on Social Situation in Areas of Special State Concern with proposed Measures for Improvement and Faster Development of these Areas*. (submitted to the Croatian Parliament on June 20, 2002).

with special focus on accumulation of social capital in post-war areas and citizens' participation in the local and national policy-making processes. The current phase of completion of the return process and Croatia's application for the EU membership represent a critical moment for ensuring that the support to the post-war community mobilization and reconciliation efforts are treated as part of the long-term solution of Croatia's development needs, rather than being approached as part of the problem belonging to the past, about to be resolved and forgotten.

For that purpose, Center for Peace Studies, a Zagreb based NGO with rich experience in community-peacebuilding and relevant educational and research programs, will focus on three particular policy areas related to mainstreaming peacebuilding into the Croatian development and security agenda – (1) promoting sustainable return and socio-economic development of post-war areas; (2) ensuring sustained support to community-based peacebuilding and (3) integrating peacebuilding into national security agenda.

1. Policy Area: Promoting and Monitoring the Efficient and Equitable Implementation of the Existent Framework for Sustainable Return or Refugees and Socio-Economic Development of Post-war Communities

Over the past three years, the Government has managed to reform the legislative and administrative framework for refugee return, which used to be discriminatory against ethnic Serbs. Equitable reconstruction and property return are eventually underway, with the objective of completing the process by the end of 2003, which is contingent on the provision of alternative housing for temporary occupants, mostly ethnic Croatian settlers. The international community is putting strong emphasis on the importance of finding a just resolution of all cases of lost tenancy rights, impeding the return of Serbs who have no other property in Croatia. Over the past year, the Ministry of Public Works, Reconstruction and Construction has made very first steps towards cooperation with local NGOs – the Ministry has sought services of human rights NGOs in respect to tracing property owners who have found refuge in Serbia and B-H and has included key NGOs representing interests of Serbian refugees and Croatian settlers in the implementation of the current reconstruction program. Nevertheless, sustainable return and revitalization of post-war areas will not take place unless local communities are provided with more support and opportunities for socio-economic development, by means of successful decentralization and regional development that would account the benefits of inter-sectoral partnerships and citizens' participation in all phases of policy-making and implementation, so that existent social networks and best practices devised at the community level are put to use. This policy initiative will be implemented through the following policy initiatives and specific activities:

1.1. Watchdog Website on Sustainable Return and Peacebuilding in Croatia

Center for Peace Studies will develop a website, in cooperation with the news agency STINA (specialized in coverage of return issues) and nonprofit Internet server ZaMirNET, and International Policy Fellowship Program of the Central European University, which will monitor the return process and progress of peacebuilding initiatives. In addition, the website will contain interactive web forums and technological solutions for uploading materials from remote locations. The website will be updated on a monthly basis and broadly advertised in Croatia, B-H and Serbia. The main contents of the website will include:

- Information on progress of the return process in different post-war regions, from government and NGO sources, highlighting examples of successful cooperation of different actors as well as obstacles and obstructions.
- Information on relevant institutions and NGOs – their contacts, mandates and activities underway.
- Feature achievements of specific community-based peacebuilding initiatives supportive in post-war communities.
- Local and international resource materials for community-peacebuilding, e.g. texts, manuals, information on training and funding.

Expected Output:

- Established, regularly updated and well advertised website that becomes a relevant source of information for returnee and settlers' communities, NGOs, media and government on the progress of sustainable return and socio-economic revitalization of post-war areas.

Expected Outcome:

- Increased accountability of the Ministry of Public Works, Reconstruction and Construction and Government as a whole to the Croatian public and civil society regarding process of sustainable return and socio-economic revitalization of post-war areas.
- Integration of locally devised practices of inter-sectoral and inter-group collaboration into the Governmental programs.
- Enhanced advocacy for more effective sustainable return and socio-economic revitalization of post-war areas on part of the local NGOs, media and parliamentarians.

1.2. A series of round-tables on Sustainable Return and Peacebuilding in Croatia

The round tables will focus on specific, hot issues related to sustainable return and peacebuilding, bringing together national and government officials, national and local NGO activists, media and private sector representatives with interest in post-war areas. Each topic will provide opportunity for the promotion of particular positive local peacebuilding efforts. The priority topics include:

- *Property return: Achievements and challenges with focus on factors of success, based on best practices from local communities.*
- *Revitalization of Vukovar: Bridging the gaps between the government policies, community resources.*
- *Social reintegration of veterans: the value of bottom-up approach.*
- *Reconciliation processes in local communities: current achievements and challenges.*
- *Economic empowerment: Key obstacles, opportunities and successful initiatives.*
- *The role of local governments in peacebuilding: Promoting best practices.*

Expected Outputs:

- Dynamized public debate on return issues, with focus on specific opportunities and challenges related to each hot issue of return and revitalization of post-war areas, featuring concrete local practices and resulting in new partnerships on particular issues.

Expected Outcomes:

- Increased visibility of local peacebuilding practices in the policy-making arena and general public.
- Increased accountability of the Ministry of Public Works, Reconstruction and Construction and Government as a whole to the Croatian public and civil society regarding process of sustainable return and socio-economic revitalization of post-war areas.
- Increased advocacy for more effective sustainable return and socio-economic revitalization of post-war areas on part of the local NGOs, media and parliamentarians.

1.3. Exploring an inclusive process of policy formulation of Strategy of Regional Development

As time passes and the war seems further away, Croatian society is more than ever at risk of imbalanced development, where prosperous regions, like Istria, Zagreb and Medjmurje would soon share no socio-economic indicators with the post-war regions of Lika, Dalmatian hinterland or rural parts of Eastern Slavonia. For that reason, it is even more important now than immediately after the war, when the overall economic state of the society was depressing, to retain and amplify the special policy incentives segregated monitoring procedures that would ensure that adequate proportion of appropriate development resources reaches the post-war areas, through direct social and economic investments as well as through intensified exchanges between the post-war areas and more developed parts of the country.

Center for Peace Studies will take a lead in mobilizing other relevant and interested NGOs to take concerted efforts aimed at opening the Regional Development Policy articulation and implementation to NGOs and community-based organizations. The process is currently coordinated by the Ministry of Public Works, Reconstruction and Construction and supported by the EC CARDS Program. Upon initial meeting with Mrs. Franka Vojnovic and CARDS representative of the regional development policy, together with ZaMirNET, other potential partners from all three sectors will be identified and prepared for a consultative meeting on potentials for enhancing participation of non-state actors, including the Ministry, EC, key NGOs (Care International, Croatian Law Center, ZaMirNET, Center for Peace, Nonviolence and Human Rights Osijek, Center for Civil Initiatives, Green Action, Serbian Democratic Forum) public and state institutions (Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare) and private enterprises (in particular several companies with strong regional focus within Croatia and established corporate social responsibility profile). As the communication among these actors evolves, additional steps will be determined.

Expected Output:

- Established communication between the Ministry of Public Works, Reconstruction and Construction, NGOs, businesses, state and public institutions whose missions relate to regional development.

Expected Outcome:

- Increased involvement of civil society organizations in the formulation and implementation of strategy for regional development, enabling inputs of community-based best practices and ensuring stringer consideration of the context-specific needs, especially regarding the post-war areas.

2. Policy Initiative: Ensuring Sustained Support for Community-based Peacebuilding

Through the Office of NGOs, the central Government has provided significant support to civil society initiatives in post-war areas, many of which have focused on free legal aid provision, social protection of vulnerable groups, creation of new programs that promote collaboration between different social actors, whose relationships are burdened by political and ethnic divisions. Currently, preparations are underway for the establishment of the public Foundation for Civil Society Development, as well as for the articulation of the national strategy for support and development of civil society.

As the war becomes more remote, there is a need to ensure the integration of peacebuilding with community development concept, which is starting to prevail in the discourses of social service delivery oriented NGOs, international agencies and governmental actors. For that reason, the future national Strategy for Civil Society Development needs to be designed in the light of the lessons learned from the community peacebuilding practices over the past decade and interconnectedness of security, development and democracy at the level of communities, with special attention paid to the agency of civil society in the process of transformation of conflict-stricken social relationships and accumulation of social and economic capital. The future Public Foundation for Civil Society is the most promising leeway for the integration of the peacebuilding agenda into the future framework for the support of civil society's peacebuilding agency, for which introduction of criteria for peacebuilding into the program design and monitoring and evaluation system of the foundation is instrumental. The following activities will be undertaken in this respect:

2.1. Integrating Peacebuilding into the National Strategy for Support and Development of Civil Society

Center for Peace Studies will get involved in the Working Group for the articulation of National Strategy for Support and Development of Civil Society, endorsed by the national Council for Civil Society Development, making part of the comprehensive strategy development project "Croatia in the 21st century", undertaken by the Government Office for Strategy Development. Preliminary inquiries have been made and there is opportunity for the Center for Peace Studies to contribute to the elaboration of the role of civil society in respect to the national security agenda and promotion of the peacebuilding concept.

Expected Output:

- The concept of peacebuilding integrated into the national strategy for support and development of civil society.

Expected Outcome:

- Strengthened legitimacy of civil society as an important actor in the development and security of the Croatian society.

2.2. Mainstreaming Peacebuilding in the Programming and M/E of the Foundation for Civil Society Development

Based on discussions with several members of the Council for Civil Society Development and Head of Office for NGOs, Center for Peace Studies will conduct additional impact assessment of the past funding provided by the Office to community-based initiatives in post-war areas, in order to collect evidence of relevance of such support for the overall process of sustainable return and socio-economic revitalization in Croatia.

Hopefully, this information will be communicated to the Ministry of Public Works, Reconstruction and Construction as well as Government Coordination for areas of Special state Concern, resulting in inclusion of these measures and results in the Government progress reporting on return to the EC and Croatian parliament.

The assessment will also provide additional information for the future programming of the Foundation for Civil Society Development that would pay special attention to the socio-economic development of post-war areas and creation of a monitoring and evaluation system where indicators relating to peacebuilding would be clearly defined (enhanced social cohesion, social integration and self-organization in particular) and applied to all program areas.

Expected Output:

- Assessment on impact of the Government grant-making program on supporting community-based peacebuilding conducted and findings communicated to relevant Government agencies.
- M/E system established which tracks social integration.

Expected Outcome:

- Ensured sustainability of focus on peacebuilding in Government grant making programs for civil society.
- Enhanced recognition of civil society contribution to post-war social and economic development and community reintegration.

3. Policy Initiative: Integrating Peacebuilding into National Security Agenda

While the Strategy of National Security's partial compatibility with the concept of peacebuilding is ensured by the consideration of human security, engagement of civil actors and importance of international and regional cooperation, its main shortcoming is lack of specification of the role of civil institutions and organizations as well as inadequately elaborated area of internal security, aimed at building the internal capacity of the Croatian society to protect human rights, achieve sustainable development and prevent violent conflicts. At the same time, there are two clear opportunities for strengthening the role of civil actors in the internal security system – *transformation of civil service into volunteer service* and *involvement of civil society organizations into the Community Policing project*, recently launched by the Ministry of Interior.

The current scheme of civil service enables conscripts who choose this alternative to military service, to work in one of the designated public institutions and NGOs for the period of 8 months. Currently, the Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Local self-Government is responsible for coordinating this procedure. Once the obligatory military service is abolished, which is expected to happen over the upcoming two years (former Minister of Defense and president of the parliamentary party *Libra* has already launched the campaign), civil service will become incongruent with the concept of the professional army accessible to men and women. At the same time, there is strong advocacy taking place on part of the Office of NGOs and civil society for the promotion of voluntary work (a Law on Volunteering is being drafted), which coincides with the measures proposed in the National Youth Policy, to enhance social and economic mobility of youth through internship schemes. There is opportunity to transform civil service into an optional national program of volunteer service, with special focus on volunteering for community-based peacebuilding programs. That would enable young women and men to enhance their professional development, social mobility and awareness of social issues of vulnerable communities, and at the same time contribute to internal security of Croatia.

The Community Policing project of the Ministry of Interior envisages a completely new role for police personnel in local communities, where their main task would be to create trust and collaboration with citizens, formal and informal community leaders in particular that would contribute to crime prevention and greater respect of human

rights on part of the police. Since the project is still in its formative phase, there is opportunity to explore ways of involving civil society organizations in the training for community policing, as well as in the actual implementation of the community-policing program in specific local communities. At present, Croatian Helsinki Committee has had most direct contacts and input into this reform process. Center for Peace Studies' role would be ensuring greater involvement of NGOs in the training component of the community police units, with special focus on approaching post-war communities, as well as their effective networking with community based initiatives. The following major activities are planned:

3.1. Development of a Policy Proposal for Transforming Civil Service into Volunteer Service and Related Advocacy

Center for Peace Studies will develop a policy proposal for the transformation of civil service into volunteer service, as a measure that is grounded in three national strategies - Strategy of National Security, National Youth Policy and upcoming Strategy for Support and Development of Civil Society. The proposal will be developed in consultations with the Office for NGOs and future Foundation for Civil Society Development, National Commission of Civil Service, and Institute for the Protection of Family, Motherhood and Youth and the Ministry of Defense, as well as with other interested NGOs, such as Unija 47, group for conscientious objection, within the Antiwar Campaign Croatia, political parties, such as Libra and the Faculty of Political Sciences, Department for Security Studies (prof. Cvrtila). Once concrete policy options are elaborated and evaluated, Center for Peace Studies will focus on lobbying for their consideration in the next phase of the reform of the military.

Expected Output:

- Policy proposal developed and presented to top relevant policy makers, key alliances established.

Expected Outcome:

- Civil service transformed into Volunteer Service AND/OR public debate open on the relevance of community-based peacebuilding and community development to internal security.

3.2. Enhancing Involvement of Civil Society Organizations in the Community Policing Project of the Ministry of Interior

Center for Peace Studies will organize a public round table "Community Policing and Civil Society Organizations: Opportunities for Cooperation", the agenda and participants of which will be determined by means of exploratory interviews with the officials of the Ministry of Interior responsible for the Community Policing project and key national and community-based NGOs interested in learning more about the project. The round table will hopefully result in concrete suggestions and follow-up initiatives for greater involvement of civil society in the training of police officers and implementation of the Community-Policing project. Full coverage of the round table in the media will be ensured.

Expected Output:

- Increased communication between Community Policing project and NGOs.

Expected Outcome:

- Enhanced communication and cooperation of local civil initiatives and local police forces in local communities, enhanced protection and promotion of human rights, decrease in violation of human rights on part of the police.

The peacebuilding policy approach can help the Croatian policymakers shift focus to the key question of the different policies' interrelatedness and long-term impact on the most precious resource that gets broken in wars – the richness, permeability and elasticity of social networks. Social networks are the most major channel through which knowledge and economic wealth are generated and transferred. Indeed, the most important reason for choosing peacebuilding as a perspective for approaching post-war areas is the chance to think of those communities in terms of complex and resourceful social spaces with more plentiful power potential, if effort is made to support the emerging interactions beneath the surface of static institutional arrangements, stagnant economic status and rigid social positions, created by the dynamics of violence. Peacebuilding perspective is in its essence long-sighted, as it enables the expansion of imagination of what the social relationships could be like, how much power and wealth could be accumulated, even if the current state of affairs may indicate static relations, political conditioning, inequality and scarcity of resources.